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Excise

Present policy of Government regarding prohibition.

*76 *Q*.—Mr. S. Satyamurti : Will the hon. the Minister for Public Health be pleased to state—

(*a*) what his present policy is towards prohibition of alcoholic drink in the province ;

(*b*) whether he has given up the idea of introducing prohibition in two districts as an experiment ; and

(*c*) whether this Government is treating the subject of total prohibition as a Transferred subject or as a Central or Reserved subject ?

A.—(*a*) The position of Government has been set out in G.O. No. 1576, dated 17th September 1926, which was laid upon the Editors' Table and the present Minister for Excise has no intention of receding from that declaration of policy. On 5th June 1928 he convened a meeting of the Excise Advisory Committee in order that he might take its advice on the action to be taken in pursuance of the resolution passed by the Legislative Council on the 22nd October 1927 that total prohibition of drink in the Madras Presidency within the course of twenty years be declared to be the goal of Government. The Committee was unanimously of opinion that the first essential step was the creation of active public opinion throughout the Presidency against drink and educating the masses on the evils of drink in order that any temperance or prohibition measures or legislation undertaken may have the co-operation and support of the general public and was not able to suggest anything else. In accordance with the advice given by the Excise Advisory Committee the Government have agreed to spend money on propaganda work to discourage the drink habit. Further details of the scheme are now being considered.

(*b*) He never had any idea of introducing prohibition in two districts as an experiment.

(*c*) This question is now under the consideration of the Government.

Mr. S. Satyamurti :—" With reference to clause (*a*) it is stated in G.O. No. 1576, dated 17th September 1926, that to create a dry India at once or even in the near future is impracticable. May I know what 'in the near future' means ? "

The hon. Mr. S. Muthiah Mudaliyar :—" Will the hon. Member explain what he wants ? "

Mr. S. Satyamurti :—" I am asking what the words 'to create a dry India at once or in the near future is impracticable' in the G.O. No. 1576 mean ? That is, what is the sense in which the Government use the term 'in the near future' ? "

The hon. Mr. S. Muthiah Mudaliyar :—" I believe I am not giving a personal opinion when I say that the policy of the Government is given there."

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Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"The Government Order says 'it is impossible for them to commit the Government to more than the undertaking that the Government will work up to that ideal.' Is that the meaning?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"I believe a repetition will not make it stronger."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"Some of us have a vain hope that people must improve. I am asking the hon. Member whether he also accepts the statement, i.e., whether he accepts the position that the ultimate goal of total prohibition is beyond the pale of any specific definite period."

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"The statement is there; it is clear enough and it is difficult to make it any the clearer."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"There ought to be a definite programme with regard to prohibition in this Province."

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"I have already said that the policy of the Government is there and the present Government has no idea of going behind it."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"Therefore I am asking to have an idea of the word 'local option.' I shall be satisfied with the meaning the hon. Minister gives to that word."

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"'Local option' is very wide and some of the measures the Government have already taken are within the meaning of that word (Laughter)."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"The policy of local option is inevitably directed towards the curtailment of the sale of liquor. I am therefore asking whether Government accepts that it is unwise to follow a policy of curtailing the number of places for the supply of liquor."

11-15 a.m. The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"The word 'local option' is wide. As regards the number of shops, the Government are reducing."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"Either I am very dull this morning or my hon. Friend is not attentive."

The hon. the PRESIDENT :—"There should be no cross-examination."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"I am simply asking whether the Government accept that policy. I am asking information only on about three or four points. I am not asking for the reasons."

The hon. the PRESIDENT :—"The hon. Member must see that supplemental questions do not amount to cross-examination."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"I am not asking about the reasons; I am only asking whether they accept the policy. I am asking whether the Government accept the position that any further reduction in the number of shops is disadvantageous and that such a measure is not a very effective remedy to prevent excessive drinking?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"They consider that it is not a very potent remedy. To a certain extent they will follow that principle, as far as they think it will be useful."

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Mr. G. HARISARVOTTAMA RAO :—"May I know whether the hon. Minister intends to carry out the resolution passed by the Legislative Council on the 22nd October 1927 that the total prohibition of drink in the Madras Presidency within the course of twenty years be declared to be the goal of Government? Will he take any practical steps towards that direction while he holds office?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"It is in a very comprehensive form."

Rao Bahadur C. S. RATNASABHAPATHI MUDALIYAR :—"It is stated that in order to create public opinion with regard to temperance and prohibition, they want to have propaganda work. Will the hon. Minister say whether public opinion is not already overwhelmingly in favour of prohibition and temperance now?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"Public opinion of one section of people, viz., the higher classes, is in favour of it; public opinion of the drinking classes is not in favour of it."

Mr. R. NAGAN GOWDA :—"In answer to clause (*a*) it is stated that there should be propaganda work. May I know how much money will be set apart for that purpose?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"As much as is necessary."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—"May I take it that the hon. Minister and the Government will not move in the matter unless the drinking classes come forward and say that they do not want to drink?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"I am afraid the hon. Member for the University has misunderstood the position. It depends to a certain extent on the feeling of the drinking classes who should be pursuaded not to drink."

Mr. G. HARISARVOTTAMA RAO :—"May I know from the hon. Minister for Excise whether he is not prepared to take any administrative steps apart from propaganda work to further the cause advocated by the resolution of the Legislative Council?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"It all depends upon the Excise Advisory Committee. They have advised the present action. If they suggest anything further, I will consider it."

Mr. R. NAGAN GOWDA :—"If I understand the hon. Member correctly, he said that the drinking classes are not in favour of prohibition. May I know what efforts have been taken to find out the opinion of the drinking classes?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"All the means at the disposal of the Government. The views and habits of those people have been ascertained long ago."

Mr. K. R. KARANT :—"May I know whether, apart from the opinion of the Excise Advisory Committee, the hon. the Minister has any policy of his own?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—"I am afraid Mr. President, I cannot give answers as regards my own policy."

Mr. K. R. KARANT :—"As Minister of Government."

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The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" The Excise Advisory Committee advises the Government and the Government follows that policy."

Mr. C. V. VENKATARAMANA AYYANGAR :—" May I know whether the Government have any idea of trying the experiment in two districts at least? I am asking the Government and the Minister and not Mr. Mudaliyar."

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" No."

Mr. R. SRINIVASA AYYANGAR :—" May I know whether propaganda work will be carried on all over the Presidency or whether the intention is to restrict it only to particular parts of the Presidency ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" The intention is to have it all over the Presidency."

Mr. J. A. SALDANHA :—" May I enquire whether the present hon. Minister is aware that Diwan Bahadur Arogyaswami Mudaliyar stated in Mangalore and Salem that the intention of the Government was to introduce total prohibition in two districts ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I am not aware of the pronouncement made either at Salem or at Mangalore. I am aware of some other thing in connexion with that."

Mr. P. C. VENKATAPATHI RAJU :—" May I know whether the hon. the Minister will take action to introduce prohibition in places where there is a strong public opinion, and where the public will actively co-operate in favour of it ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" If the hon. Member will specify the places where there is strong opinion, such steps as are necessary will be taken."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" May I know if the hon. the Minister has taken note of the fact that his predecessor in office laid down on the floor of this House the policy of the Government—not his own policy during the discussion under the Excise grant ? 'Prohibition will be the goal and our excise policy. The idea of a dry Presidency will be accepted and worked up to. Our policy will be further reduction of shops and of the quantity of consumption, and the reduction of the limits of private possession and to adopt such other methods as may be found possible.' May I know the reasons why the hon. the Minister has rejected that policy and has gone back to the earlier statement of policy laid down as early as 1926 ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I fail to perceive the difference between the two."

Diwan Bahadur R. N. AROGYASWAMI MUDALIYAR :—" The statement was made on the floor of the House. The Government said that they would work up to it by successive stages. May I know whether the hon. the Minister accepts that policy and intends taking any definite step towards securing total prohibition ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :— " It will be worked up to in the only way in which it is possible to work it up."

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Diwan Bahadur R. N. AROGYASWAMI MUDALIYAR :—" Progressive stages mean definite steps to stop drinking and not carrying out propaganda work. I want to know if the hon. the Minister proposes to take any definite steps in the matter of securing prohibition not by propaganda work."

The hon. Mr. S MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" The Government consider that the next effective way of reducing the drinking evil is to induce the drinking people not to drink."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" In view of the answer given, may I know what the Government exactly mean when they say that the first essential step is the creation of active public opinion in order that any temperance or prohibition measures or legislation undertaken may have the co-operation of the general public? May I ask specifically therefore whether the present hon. Minister's policy is that he will not take any steps towards prohibition until he has specifically created public opinion by propaganda ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I am sorry, Mr. President, that the hon. Member for the University has not been following the answer I gave to the hon. Member, Mr. Venkatapathi Raju. Where there is public opinion and where the circumstances are favourable, steps will be taken."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" May I know if there is any district now to the knowledge of the hon. Minister or any area where there is public opinion likely to facilitate such steps towards prohibition being taken ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I should be thankful if information can be given on the matter."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" Will the hon. Minister give the information at the disposal of the Government ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" There is some information ; the information may not be accurate or may be accurate."

Mr. R. NAGAN GOWDA :—" Will he be pleased to place the information on the table of the House ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" The information is not so definite as to be placed before the House."

Mr. ABDUL HAMID KHAN SAHIB :—" May I know whether the hon. Member is aware that eleven toddy shops that were ordered to be closed were auctioned again by the Collector of Madras ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I am not aware of it."

Mr. P. C. VENKATAPATHI RAJU :—" May I know from the hon. the Minister whether there should be active public opinion throughout the whole Presidency ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I have already stated ' any limited area '."

Diwan Bahadur R. N. AROGYASWAMI MUDALIYAR :—" May I know whether the present hon. Minister has thrown overboard the excise policy of the previous ministry ? "

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" I do not think the late Ministry had any definite policy (laughter)."

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MR. S. SATYAMURTI :—" May I know then whether the statement which I read out is accepted by the hon. Minister? The recognized policy has been the policy of the Government which the hon. the ex-Minister laid down. May I ask whether the present Ministry accepts that as the policy of the Government?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" That is the policy of the Government whether it is definite or not."

Progress made towards prohibition in the Madras Presidency.

*77 *Q.*—Mr. S. SATYAMURTI : Will the hon. the Minister for Public Health be pleased to state—

(*a*) whether after his taking office he has done anything towards prohibition in this Province;

(*b*) if so, the nature and the extent of that action; and

(*c*) if no action has been taken, the reasons therefor?

A.—(*a*), (*b*) & (*c*) The Excise Advisory Committee decided that the practical way of working towards the goal was educating the masses in the evils of drink and creating popular opinion and support against it and Government are considering schemes for propaganda work.

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" May I know what steps he has actually taken, apart from getting proposals or schemes for starting educative propaganda, to start prohibition? May I know, apart from that, whether he has taken any specific steps towards prohibition, temperance, local option or reduction of shops?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" Shops have been reduced; shops which were open have been closed. That is a definite step."

Mr. S. SATYAMURTI :—" How many shops and in what districts?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" Notice; at least twenty shops."

Mr. J. A. SALDANHA :—" May I know whether any steps have been taken as proposed by the policy declared by his predecessor to increase the areas of prohibition?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" Prohibition is to be reached by gradual stages; the reduction of 20 shops to 10 shops is a step in that direction."

Mr. A. RANGANATHA MUDALIYAR :—" How many of the shops closed are shops which could not be sold in auction?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" Notice."

Diwan Bahadur R. N. AROGYASWAMI MUDALIYAR :—" May I ask the hon. Minister whether he has rejected the resolution of this House which lays down a definite policy?"

The hon. Mr. S. MUTHIAH MUDALIYAR :—" A policy has been laid down by this House to be reached by successive stages within a period of twenty years. The Excise Advisory Committee which consists of hon. Members of this House were asked to submit practical proposals to give effect to that policy. Their proposals have been accepted."